R E P O R T R E S U M E S

ED 018 731 AC 002 256

TEN TO FIGHT A WAR, VOCATIONAL TRAINING IN THE ANTI-POVERTY PROGRAM.

BY- GOTTESFELD, HARRY

PUB DATE 68

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.25 HC-$0.40 8P.

DESCRIPTORS- *POVERTY PROGRAMS, *JOB TRAINING, *SUBPROFESSIONALS, *RESEARCHERS, *EVALUATION, INDIGENOUS PERSONNEL, MINORITY GROUPS, EAST HARLEM, NEW YORK CITY, WAR ON POVERTY,

DESPITE PROBLEMS IN FUNDING AND ADMINISTRATION, THE ANTIPOVERTY PROGRAM HAS CREATED NEW LEADERS IN THE GHETTOES, DEVELOPED NEW SKILLS FOR THE POOR, AND CONTRIBUTED TO SELF CONFIDENCE AND PERSONAL INITIATIVE. FOR EXAMPLE, IN CONJUNCTION WITH AN EAST HARLEM ANTIPOVERTY PROJECT, TEN LOCAL RESIDENTS (NEGROES AND PUERTO RICANS) WERE TRAINED AS RESEARCH AIDES IN A FEDERALLY FUNDED SIX WEEK PROGRAM. THE TRAINING WAS COMPREHENSIVE, AND THE REWARDS AND IMPORTANCE OF THE POSITION WERE EMPHASIZED. MORALE, SELF-ESTEEM, AND WORK PERFORMANCE WERE GOOD BOTH DURING TRAINING AND AFTERWARDS. A FOLLOWUP ON THE AIDES A YEAR AND A HALF LATER REVEALED EDUCATIONAL AND CAREER PROGRESS IN ALMOST EVERY INSTANCE. (LY)

ED018731

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

Ten to Fight a War: Vocational Training in the Anti-Poverty Program

by Harry Gottesfeld

The Anti-Poverty Program has been subject to a great deal of negative publicity. Abuses, factional fights, and failures have been spotlighted. I recall one day that a television network preliminarily spent a whole day interviewing the staff and televising the programs, many of them excellent, of a local anti-poverty agency. Only one minute actually appeared on television and this was devoted to a commentary of Negro and Puerto-Rican rivalries regarding the anti-poverty agency.

Little publicity is given to the facts that the Anti-Poverty Program was never given sufficient funds to make an appreciable change in the number of poor in the United States, constant changes in policy, program and funding does not allow for any continuity of effort, and cumbersome administrative red tape has resulted in many programs not being able to meet their payroll and having to borrow money from outside sources. Overlooked is that the Anti-Poverty Program has created new leaders in the ghetto, developed new skills for the poor and given thousands hope and new expectancies about what they can do for themselves. A research study by this writer and Mrs G. Dozier indicated that poor people trained and given responsible jobs in the Anti-Poverty Program in a relatively brief period of time changed their entire self concepts. Hopelessness and helplessness gave place to

self-confidence and personal initiative. A psychotherapist accomplishing such changes with an individual client over a period of many years would be proud of his efforts. Yet the Anti-Poverty Program is effecting such changes in only months with tens of thousands.

A meaningful job is one that fulfills community needs, pays decent wages, has opportunities for advancement and offers interest and challenge. Some jobs of this order for the poor have been created through the Anti-Poverty Program. And much more could be done. Meaningful jobs can be created in a variety of fields dealing with human services, one of the fastest growing areas in our economy.

When I served as Research Director for a local anti-poverty program (M.E.N.D., East Harlem), I believed that local people could be employed meaningfully as research workers. Agencies, universities, research organizations usually employ a group of professional non-residents to survey the attitudes, opinions and habits of ghetto residents. The residents are often uncertain and even suspicious of the motives of the researchers. The residents' responses to the unknown researcher are likely not to be frank but instead serve as protection from any danger they may perceive in the research situation. For many ghetto residents previous inquiries, such as by the Department of Welfare, have resulted in some personal disadvantage to themselves. On the other hand, local residents employed as research interviewers are more likely to be able to gain the confidence of respondents and elicit more honest

answers. With proper training, local residents could be the source of a pool of research workers.

Considering the number of research and evaluation studies conducted in East Harlem (as well as any other ghetto area) by governmental agencies, private social agencies, business organizations, political polling organizations and others, it was felt that hundreds of local residents could be trained and employed as research workers. Accordingly, a proposal was written to the Government in which a modest number of 50 local people were requested to be trained and employed as research workers. The Federal Government approved the proposal but only for 10 people because of limited funds. The budget for the War Against Poverty is hardly enough to wage several good sizes battles, let alone a war.

It was decided to train and employ the 10 as an example of what could be done and hopefully later there would be additional funds for expanding this program.

Ten local residents were selected from the East Harlem area. All were Black or Puerto Rican. Most had completed high school. Several were high school dropouts and several were beginning college. The typical person selected was in his early twenties, married with a family to support. He had no previous research experience and had never even considered research as a possible career.

The training period was for six weeks. The following points were emphasized in training:

Training in research was to be comprehensive. While the trainees were to be employed as research aides in the community action agency in East Harlem when they completed training, the training had to be broad enough so that they had skills which were marketable for a variety of situations if they chose to leave the agency. Therefore the six week training program included study topics such as the Anti-Poverty Program and Organization, Agency Program and Organization, Interviewing Methods, Methods of Data Collection, Statistical Analysis of Data and Demography and Ethnic Groups of the East Harlem Area. The program included role playing of typical research interviews, studying and discussing reports regarding the Anti-Poverty Program and the local anti-poverty effort, study of area maps and charts, field trips throughout the East Harlem area, reading and discussing books about ethnic groups such as Moynihan and Glaser's The Melting Pot, study of methods of statistical analysis, comparisons of different research methods, visits to other anti-poverty programs and a visit to a data processing center. The research trainees worked an eight hour day and there were additionally several hours of homework. Each trainee was regularly evaluated on his work and was required at the end of the training to write a paper on a special topic of his own interest.

The importance and rewards of the position were emphasized. The research trainees were frequently told of the job opportunities in research, the interesting nature of the work and its relationship to vital areas of human endeavor. They were addressed by officials of the government, professors of universities and other professionals (the writer himself has post-doctoral training in research and taught at a university). Several trainees were asked to be interviewed on radio and once a training session was televised. The director of a data processing agency was asked to explain to them not only the workings of his organization but the kinds of jobs that his organization had, the rate of pay of these jobs and the type of training necessary to obtain these positions. After the director explained various research positions the trainees asked the director his rate of pay, his training and how they could obtain his job.

In order to psychologically emphasize the importance and value of their training and positions, special materials and occasions were provided. A research portfolio was issued to the trainees at their first training session. These portfolios contained books and research materials for study and work. At the end of the training period, there was a formal graduation exercise in which certificates of successful completion were awarded. By fortuitous circumstances the Mayor of New York attended the graduation exercises.

Training expectancies were high. Each research trainee was expected to reach a high level of accomplishment. Although most of the trainees had a high school education, the training sessions were pitched at a college level. I recall that once when I was explaining some statistical methods of analysis, I realized that few of the trainees seemed to have understood. I commented on this and one said, "It's true that we didn't understand some of these things. Could you come in early tomorrow so that we can go over the material until we do understand it?" And early the next day we went over the material several times again until it was understood. What is important here is the psychological implication that their teacher or trainer expected them to come up to a high level of accomplishment and they did so.

Morale, self-esteem, and work performance was good throughout the training period and afterwards when they began to work as research aides for the Anti-Poverty Program. The director of the data processing center commented that as a group the research aides seemed better motivated and asked better questions than graduate students who had visited his center.

Follow-up on the research aides one and one half years after training shows the following: Educationally (the aides were told just before they completed training that if they wanted leadership positions in research they would have to obtain academic degress), the two research aides who had dropped out of high school are in the process

of completing high school. Two research aides have recently begun college. Two research aides have been offered scholarships to colleges. One research aide was promoted to a supervisory research position in the Anti-Poverty Agency in which he was trained. Another has been hired for a higher level research position with the Community Development Agency. Two of the research aides have become administrators in other Anti-Poverty agencies. The other research aides still working for the Anti-Poverty Agency are considered to be doing excellent work.

One note on the selection of aides for training. In one instance I, and other staff members had our doubts as to whether a particular candidate would successfully complete the program. His previous work history was very poor. However he turned out to be among our best aides. This misjudgment on the part of professionals of the staff is probably a common one for professionals. We tend to judge people by past performances. We know very little about the positive potentials of people. A person faced with bad situations in the past may have responded poorly, but faced with a new and real opportunity in which his capabilities are allowed to flower, he may respond in a new, positive manner.

What are the implications of the story of these ten aides? This was a victory in a tiny skirmish in the war against poverty. Although the program I described is considered successful, it has not been expanded. Imagine that if instead of ten there had been a thousand research people trained from citizens in poor sections of the entire New York area. If there had been thirty different human relations specialities trained similarly, such as consumer rights and community-school liaison...If this was repeated throughout the country...With such efforts we might be winning major battles in the war against poverty. However, wars require total commitment for victory.

ERIC Clearinghouse
APR 18 1968
on Adult Education